

VZCZCXRO2406
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHAM #2202/01 2031507
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 211507Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3183
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0669

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002202

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ELA AND PRM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/21/2018

TAGS: [PREF](#) [JO](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: GOJ: NO POLICY CHANGE ON IRAQI REFUGEES DESPITE
CONFLICTING MEDIA REPORTS ON RESIDENCY PERMITS

REF: AMMAN 563

Classified By: Classified by Charge d'Affaires Daniel Rubinstein for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Despite a recent media report that the GOJ would no longer grant or extend residence permits to Iraqis living in Jordan, there is no indication that the GOJ has, in fact, altered its procedures, and local media subsequently reported an MOI denial of any change. In a July 20 meeting, Prime Minister Dahabi assured Charge that there has been no change to GOJ policy allowing Iraqis to access the public education and health systems regardless of their legal status.

Amnesty: Expired or Not?

12. (U) On July 14, local paper Al-Arab Al-Yawm reported that the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) had stopped issuing and extending residency permits for Iraqi citizens in Jordan, and that the GOJ would ask those out of status to leave the country immediately.

13. (SBU) This report may have been referring to expiration of a temporary amnesty that the GOJ had announced in February (reftel). Under the terms of the amnesty, Iraqis without proper residency could either leave Jordan and have their overstay fines (which amount to USD2.10 for every day out of status) waived; or pay half the accrued fine to obtain a three-month residence permit, during which time they could seek legal residency or conclude their affairs in Jordan and depart. After announcing this policy in mid-February, the GOJ extended the deadline several times, and it was nominally set to expire on June 17.

14. (U) On July 20, however, the English-language paper of record Jordan Times carried a Ministry of Interior statement declaring that it had not stopped issuing/extending residency permits to Iraqi citizens. Meanwhile, in comments to the media, Interior Minister Eid Al-Fayez expressed disappointment that only 15,000 Iraqis had taken advantage of the amnesty policy; according to Fayez, 3,000 individuals returned to Iraq, while 12,000 Iraqis paid fifty percent of their fine to gain temporary legal residency.

15. (U) Fayez also commented on Jordan's new entry visa procedures for Iraqis, telling the Jordan Times that the MOI had received visa applications for a total of 27,817 Iraqis since the inception of the system on April 22. (Note: The MOI began issuing visas on May 1. End note.) According to Fayez, the MOI has approved over 60 percent of the applications, has rejected about 22 percent, and is still reviewing about 18 percent. Fayez said that it takes his Ministry between three and four weeks to process a visa application.

And Does It Matter?

¶6. (C) Regardless of whether the amnesty has expired or been given a stealth extension, GOJ practices do not appear to have changed. As of July 21, according to a Jordanian military official working at the Karama-Trebil border crossing, border officials continue to waive overstay fines for Iraqis who said they were returning to Iraq permanently. Naser Al-Ramadin, Assistant Director of the Interior Minister's office, reassured Consul on July 20 that Iraqis registered with UNHCR will not be deported, barring security concerns. UNHCR Jordan has heard similar assurances from their GOJ contacts, underscoring that the Jordanian commitment to allowing Iraqi refugees to remain in Jordan had not changed.

Official Assurance of Continued Access to Social Services

¶7. (C) On July 20, Prime Minister Nader Dahabi assured Charge that Jordan would continue its policy of allowing Iraqis, regardless of their legal status, open access to Jordanian public schools and access to the public health system at the rate of noninsured Jordanians.

Comment

¶8. (C) The low numbers taking advantage of the amnesty come as no surprise. For poor Iraqis, even fifty percent of their overstay fines would be an enormous hurdle, especially when considered against the marginal potential benefit (a

AMMAN 00002202 002 OF 002

three-month stay). Fewer still were expected to consider the waiver of the fine a significant factor in their calculus of whether to return to Iraq. Thus, as CARE Jordan's Director told refcood on July 20, since few vulnerable Iraqis in Jordan had been able to benefit from the amnesty, whether or not this policy has officially ended has little impact on them. Of far greater importance are the continued GOJ assurances of non-refoulement and access to education and health care.

Visit Amman's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/amman>
Rubinstein